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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR R, P, AND EUR/CACEN

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: COMBATING EXTREMISM

REF: A. A. STATE 159129

[B](#). B. 04 ALMATY 4562

[C](#). C. ALMATY 2724

Classified By: Amb. John Ordway, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#). (S) Summary: Efforts to insure stability by supporting political reform and countering terrorism are at the top of the bilateral U.S.-Kazakhstan relationship, as reflected in the first two performance goal's of the Kazakhstan MPP. Post engages in a continuous dialogue with all levels of the Kazakhstani government about the need to balance law enforcement activities with greater respect for human rights. While the GOK does not always strike an equitable balance, as evidenced by the very troublesome legislation on extremism adopted earlier this year, overall the country's leadership understands the need to counter extremist and terrorist threats without exacerbating the situation. The U.S. government implements an extremely wide-ranging assistance program in Kazakhstan, with programs ranging from threat reduction and non-proliferation to HIV/AIDS prevention to English teaching. Many of these programs address the problem of countering extremism either indirectly, by alleviating conditions that provide fertile ground for extremists, or directly by advancing tolerance and understanding. End summary.

U.S. Programs Addressing Extremism

[2](#). (SBU) USAID programs: Most of USAID's programming in Kazakhstan indirectly contributes to USG counter-extremism efforts, since it aims to alleviate the conditions (unemployment, economic disparity, lack of access to primary health care, limited educational opportunities, absence of political freedom, and corruption) that foster the growth of extremism. Unaddressed, these factors may lead to disillusionment and cause the disenfranchised to become more susceptible to the allure of extremist messages. USAID also undertakes more targeted, direct interventions to address the potential threat of Islamic extremism in Kazakhstan. To help coordinate such programming, USAID hired a Religion, State, and Society (RSS) specialist in September 2004 to work directly with religious communities and local governments to develop and implement interventions aimed at preventing the spread of Islamic extremism in the region. The RSS specialist, who is based in Tashkent, works with State Department and USAID colleagues in all countries of Central Asia to achieve this outcome. The strategic approach entails active engagement with religious groups, where appropriate, to generate a sense of partnership and to increase overall understanding of USG assistance priorities, and the inclusion of religious believers in civil society and the promotion of religious freedom as a means of reducing the pool of discontented and disaffected individuals from which extremists might recruit. Programs to date which directly address extremism in Kazakhstan include:

-- Religious leaders/media tours: USAID conducts tours of program sites for religious leaders, community leaders, students, and the media in order to showcase USG assistance programs and their benefits through the eyes of beneficiaries. The tours have resulted in a greater understanding of USG goals in the region, have created an alternate message to extremist rhetoric through positive reporting on USG assistance programs and goals.

-- Conflict Mitigation Program: In Kazakhstan, USAID has worked to engage vulnerable communities in the three-year Community Action Investment Program (CAIP), which ended in summer 2005. Through a community participatory development process, USAID brought together disparate groups of citizens to help resolve community-based issues which could breed extremism in isolated areas in southern Kazakhstan (South Kazakhstan, Zhambul, and Almaty oblasts). CAIP's community-based organizations invite local religious and spiritual leaders to participate with other members of their communities to resolve issues through social and infrastructure programs. Many religious leaders are at the forefront of efforts to mobilize communities to implement programs, such as school reconstruction and refurbishment, which target at-risk youth groups. CAIP has worked in 30

communities, directly benefiting more than 246,000 people and employing over 2500 people. Although the USAID program has ended, CAIP local staff formed an NGO to continue to work closely with the religious community on issues of tolerance, fighting extremism, and general community development in targeted locations.

-- Micro-Finance to Rural Entrepreneurs: Micro and rural finance programs support stable democratic and market-oriented development by working with the portion of

the population that is generally not reached by banks or integrated into the formal economy. As poverty is alleviated and jobs created, the likelihood that individuals will resort to extremism is decreased. USAID is working on two microfinance projects in Kazakhstan that, in part, benefit groups susceptible to recruitment by extremists: the Central Asia Microfinance Alliance (CAMFA) and the EBRD Micro and Small Business Lending Program. CAMFA, which began in October 2002 and will end in October 2006, addresses three primary constraints in the regional microfinance sector: limited capacity and capital for existing microfinance institutions, the unclear legal and regulatory environment, and limited availability of microfinance services. So far, 27 microfinance institutions serving 63,000 clients have directly benefited from CAMFA assistance. The EBRD Micro and Small Business Lending Program, which began in July 2002 and ends in September 2007, USAID funds technical assistance to commercial banks that operate EBRD-funded micro and small finance facilities, helping their lending officers better assess loan applications from small business owners and expand their loan portfolios. 49,600 clients have been assisted through this program to date.

-- Training for Religious Leaders on Trafficking Issues: USAID's three-year follow-on trafficking in persons program, scheduled to begin in January 2006, contains a component designed to raise the awareness of religious leaders regarding the issues of labor and sex trafficking. The goal is to encourage religious leaders to spread information in mosques regarding labor trafficking and to promote local tolerance for returning victims of sex trafficking. This program is expected to reduce the chances that trafficking victims will fall prey to extremist propaganda.

13. (SBU) Peace Corps: There are 80 Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) teaching English in Kazakhstan, primarily to the rural non-elite. With English language skills, isolated youth have the option of accessing a much broader range of news reports and other information sources than they would get from local Kazakh and Russian-language media. In addition, PC's Education program focuses on enhancing critical thinking skills that are largely absent in the local curriculum. This skill results in youths' enhanced ability to question the status quo and opens their minds to other possibilities and value systems. While PCVs are not involved in political activities and do not advocate for one political system over another, on a daily basis they model openness, respect and tolerance of all people regardless of religion or ethnic background. Forty other PCVs work in youth- and civic-oriented NGOs, helping develop the capacity of these domestic organizations to address the key problems facing at-risk youth and their communities. The youth NGOs also teach tolerance in practice, by bringing together diverse groups of Kazakhstani young people for events such as girls' leadership camps. The exposure to youth of different faiths and ethnicities inculcates a more tolerant attitude in the participants.

14. (SBU) Public Affairs: Complementing the longer-term projects undertaken by USAID and Peace Corps, the Public Affairs Section regularly uses its shorter-term exchange and outreach programs to underscore the message of tolerance. Examples of such programs in FY05 include:

-- U.S. speaker Hibba Abugideri gave a series of lectures on "African-Americans and Islam in the U.S." in February. Several of her lectures attracted young head-scarved Kazakh women eager to discuss ways of balancing their faith with their political rights.

-- Also in February, Ambassador Ordway met with Islamic leaders in Shymkent who had participated in PA's International Visitor and Community Connections programs to discuss the impact of their U.S. experience on their efforts to promote religious freedom and interethnic understanding in Kazakhstan.

-- A Kazakhstani television crew traveled to the U.S. in July through a PA-sponsored TV COOP program to produce a documentary on Muslim life in America. The program is expected to air this fall on Mir TV, a cable company with affiliates throughout Central Asia; the expected audience is upwards of 500,000.

-- Post's Democracy Commission, managed by PA, approved a

\$13,000 grant in July for the creation of a Center for Religious Tolerance in Shymkent, South Kazakhstan Oblast, which is expected to open in mid-October. The project, which will be undertaken by an organization called Youth for the Development of Democratic Processes, will provide the general public with access to information about religions of the world, with the aim of promoting religious tolerance and pluralism. The center will provide Internet access and

contain books, reference materials, and publications about religion, sociology, theology, and anthropology of religion. The center will offer monthly training sessions on the basics of religion, the role of religions in democracies, and the role of religion in resolving social issues. It will also organize inter-religious forums and roundtable discussions with religious and public leaders to discuss urgent social and political questions.

-- from 2003 to 2005, through a program called "Religion, Human Rights, and Democracy: Peer Interactions between U.S. and Kazakhstani Religious and Civic Leaders," participants from Taraz and Shymkent in southern Kazakhstan traveled to the U.S. on exchange programs focused on religious and cultural tolerance.

15. (SBU) While not directly targeted at extremism, the variety of training programs and joint military exercises for Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Emergency Situations, and Border Guard personnel offered by DAO, SAO, DTRA, INL, and EXBS serve to raise the standards of professionalism in these organizations. This in turn decreases the likelihood that the security forces would abuse the general population and thereby provoke extremism.

----- The GOK's Approach -----

16. (S) In general as it confronts a small but growing extremist threat (analysis to be provided septel), the government of Kazakhstan focuses more on the law enforcement aspect than on efforts to reach out to at-risk groups. The GOK's overall program of economic diversification, if successful, will have a beneficial impact on the problem by alleviating the dire economic conditions in rural areas that create breeding grounds for extremism. The economic development plan is not targeted specifically at the most at-risk groups or regions, however. The overall strong growth of the Kazakhstani economy in the past decade -- averaging 9% a year with inflation remaining under control -- is the GOK's best ally in the fight, as it is raising the standard of living for Kazakhstani citizens across the board. As a secular government, the GOK ensures equal access to education for women and girls, is trying to modernize the educational system, and devotes substantial resources to scientific endeavors such as Bolashak scholarships and a new \$60 million National Center for Biotechnology. President Nazarbayev is rightly proud of Kazakhstan's record of interethnic and interfaith harmony; it is one of the few former Soviet republics that has not experienced violent conflict within its borders since independence. He frequently holds and attends events highlighting tolerance issues.

17. (S) Like the U.S., the GOK is extremely concerned about the activities of Hizb'ut Tahrir (HT) in Central Asia. In large part because the GOK could not ban HT under existing Kazakhstani counterterrorism legislation, President Nazarbayev signed legislation in February banning "extremist" organizations (ref B). The new legislation provided a very imprecise definition of extremism, including "fomenting social unrest." Although the GOK has stated that the legislation will be used only against groups such as HT, there is widespread concern in the human rights community that it could be used to limit basic freedoms. Such concerns appear justified, as opposition political party activists report that local authorities have seized complete print runs of independent newspapers and party literature on several occasions on the pretext that it had to be reviewed for extremist content.

18. (S) Kazakhstani authorities frequently arrest HT activists and those found distributing HT literature. Human rights groups that focus on religious freedom issues and prison conditions, such as the Almaty Helsinki Committee and Prison Reform International, believe that by jailing young people who are hired to distribute HT pamphlets, the GOK contributes to their radicalization. In an effort to impede HT's recruiting efforts in prisons, which are reportedly relatively successful, the GOK has begun to segregate HT members from the general prison population. It is currently grappling with the fact that such segregation hinders efforts to rehabilitate HT members.

19. (S) In conversations with the Embassy, the GOK-affiliated "Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan," the

official hierarchy of the Islamic faith in Kazakhstan, minimizes the threat posed by HT and similar groups. They do not appear to have a proactive approach to countering HT's propaganda. When asked about outreach efforts during a conversation with the Ambassador (ref C), the Deputy Mufti explained that "only Allah can bring them to the mosque; if

they come, we will teach them." A new group, the "Union of Muslims of Kazakhstan," emerged in April 2005 with the goals of reforming Islam in Kazakhstan and democratization. When the Union issued a statement that the revolutions in Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, and Ukraine were the result of desperate social injustice, the Spiritual Administration immediately filed a lawsuit charging the new group with "fanning religious conflicts." The Union has maintained a low public profile since that time.

Comment

110. (S) Post believes that its assistance programs address a broad range of the fundamental problems that contribute to extremism. We will continue to look for more opportunities to direct assistance efforts toward this issue. We will also continue our dialogue with the GOK on the need to focus its law enforcement efforts only on those groups and individuals that present a genuine threat, as well as the need to devote greater attention to the root causes of extremism.
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